



Morning Alert - Wednesday, December 20, 2017

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HEADLINES

Morning news

Most networks gave top play to reports that the crisis management committee of the Japan Sumo Association will hold a meeting today to report on the results of its investigation into the alleged assault by sumo grand champion Harumafuji. Fuji TV led with a report on public debut of giant panda cub Xiang Xiang at Ueno Zoo yesterday. NTV reported that Saori Fujisaki, a member of the pop group Sekai no Owari, was nominated for this year's Naoki Prize.

Top stories in national dailies included JR West's disclosure that a crack found in a bullet train could have led to a derailment (Asahi); suspected bid-rigging involving four major construction companies for a maglev train project (Mainichi, Yomiuri, and Sankei); and an increase in the number of young Japanese investors buying Japanese equities (Nikkei).

INTERNATIONAL

Japanese, South Korean foreign ministers discuss comfort women, North Korea

All papers reported on a meeting between Foreign Minister Kono and his South Korean counterpart Kang Kyung-wha in Tokyo on Tuesday. The papers wrote that although the two officials met for three hours, they were unable to narrow the gap over the 2015 agreement on the comfort women. While Kang notified Kono of South Korea's plan to announce on Dec. 27 the results of its review of the comfort women agreement, Kono stated that it is essential to steadily implement the bilateral accord in which the two nations agreed that the comfort women issue was resolved finally and irreversibly. Mainichi wrote that the ROK minister held a separate meeting with Prime Minister Abe at the Kantei on Tuesday. The paper wrote that although both Abe and Kono called for South Korea's steady implementation of the comfort women agreement in their meetings with Kang, they did not

press her out of concern that a schism between Tokyo and Seoul would only benefit North Korea.

Yomiuri, Nikkei, and Sankei wrote that the two ministers agreed to apply further pressure on North Korea, but Asahi said that Tokyo and Seoul remain divided over how to respond to North Korea's nuclear and missile programs. Yomiuri and Nikkei also wrote that Kang invited Abe to visit South Korea in February to attend the opening ceremony of the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics, but the prime minister refrained from giving a clear answer and only offered his best wishes for the success of the event.

U.S. releases new National Security Strategy

All papers reported on President Trump's announcement on Monday of a new National Security Strategy, in which the President said that China and Russia are seeking to challenge American influence, values, and wealth. Noting that the Obama administration sought to establish constructive and cooperative relations with Beijing, the papers wrote that this is a major policy turnaround by the Trump administration. Yomiuri wrote that the President clearly expressed his policy of attaching importance to the Indo-Pacific by deepening cooperation with Japan, Australia, and India, the key allies in the region. Nikkei speculated that under the Trump administration, the United States will likely ask its allies to play greater roles in dealing with common threats.

Poll: North Korea seen as military threat to U.S., Japan

Yomiuri front-paged the results of its joint survey with Gallup conducted on Nov. 27 through Dec. 3, which showed that 83% of respondents in Japan and 82% in the United States view North Korea as a military threat to their nations. Some 82% in Japan and 79% in the U.S. said the DPRK should not be allowed to possess nuclear weapons.

The same survey showed that 56% (down 1 point from last year) of the Japanese respondents said that U.S.-Japan relations are in good shape, while 50% (up 2 points) of the American respondents expressed a similar view. Asked about their views on the bilateral relations in the future, 77% (up from 40%) of the Japanese respondents projected that the current state of relations will continue, while 12% (up from 9%) said they will get better, and 6% (down from 41%) said they will get worse. In the United States, 39% (up from 22%) said relations will remain the same, while 33% (down from 35%) said they will improve and 21% (down from 40%) said they will deteriorate.

SECURITY

GOJ officially decides to deploy Aegis Ashore system

All papers reported on the GOJ's official decision at a cabinet meeting on Tuesday to acquire two Aegis Ashore systems to enhance Japan's missile defense against possible ballistic missile attacks by North Korea. The systems will probably be deployed at GSDF camps in Akita and Yamaguchi Prefectures and be put into operation by FY2023. Mainichi wrote that it remains to be seen whether the deployment of the expensive systems will be as effective as Japan hopes because there is no

telling what kind of weapons North Korea will develop in the six years until 2023 when the system is expected to be deployed. Nikkei wrote that there are problems with the deployment, including the high cost and how to improve its intercept accuracy in response to improvements in DPRK missiles. Yomiuri wrote that the deployment will also help strengthen Japan's deterrence against China and Russia, which have been modernizing their militaries. Sankei wrote that although the GOJ swiftly decided on the deployment primarily because of the threat posed by North Korea, it has a long-term goal of developing an integrated air-defense system with China in mind.

U.S. military resumes CH-53E helicopter flights in Okinawa

Asahi, Mainichi, Yomiuri, Nikkei, and Tokyo Shimbun reported on the U.S. military's resumption on Tuesday of flights by CH-53E helicopters in Okinawa. Asahi wrote that Governor Onaga expressed anger at the fact that the flights were resumed only six days after the fallen window incident in Ginowan. He was quoted as saying: "The U.S. military has resumed helicopter flights unilaterally, and incidents have happened repeatedly. We cannot trust the U.S. military's aircraft maintenance and safety management. The Japanese government should be held accountable if incidents involving U.S. military aircraft continue."

